DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 438 239 SO 031 539

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TITLE Postmodernism: An Overview of Theory.
PUB DATE 1999-11-12
NOTE 53p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Georgia Art Education Association (Valdosta, GA, November 12, 1999). "Presentation Designer/Co-Presenter: Stephen Lahr."
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aesthetics; Art Criticism; *Art Expression; Art History; Discipline Based Art Education; Higher Education; Modernism; *Postmodernism; *Theories
IDENTIFIERS *Art Concepts; Artistic Thought; Theoretical Orientation

ABSTRACT

This paper describes postmodern theory as a paradigm composed of concepts and ideas. It does not describe postmodern theory as if it were developed logically from a simple premise, because it was not, nor can the postmodern paradigm be described in neat, concise terms. The paper presents a review and explication of postmodernism's theoretical foundations, that is, main concepts, beliefs, and assumptions. It neither requires nor advocates acceptance of postmodernism in lieu of competing paradigms, nor does it attempt to model a postmodern style or position. Likewise, it is not offering a critique of postmodernism. The paper addresses postmodernism as a theory or philosophy, not necessarily as a stylistic movement in art and architecture or as a set of applications for the classroom. It concludes with implications of postmodern theory for discipline based art education (DBAE), with sections on production, aesthetics, art history, and art criticism. Appendix A contains a comparative profile of tenets of modernism and postmodernism; Appendix B contains a glossary of terms. Contains a 21-item bibliography. (BT)

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POSTMODERNISM: AN OVERVIEW OF THEORY

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Presented at the Georgia Art Education Association Annual Meeting

November 12, 1999

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SO 031 539

This essay is based primarily upon Cary, R. (1998). Critical art pedagogy: Foundations for postmodern art education. New York: Garland.

POSTMODERNISM: AN OVERVIEW OF THEORY

Introduction

This presentation offers a description of postmodern theory. I will describe postmodern theory as a paradigm composed of concepts and ideas, which may be communicated in ordinary language for the most part. A paradigm is a complex set of big, messy ideas, values and beliefs that emerged gradually from many sources. A description of a paradigm, especially the postmodern paradigm, is one to be painted with a broad brush. I will not describe postmodern theory as if it were developed logically from a single premise, because it was not. Nor can the postmodern paradigm be described in neat, concise terms.

A lot of nonsensical jargon, evasive posturing, and vague over-intellectualization about postmodernism has escaped, like a noxious gas, into today's intellectual atmosphere. This essay intends to present a review and explication of postmodernism's theoretical foundations, that is, its main concepts, beliefs, and assumptions. This essay neither requires nor advocates acceptance of postmodernism in lieu of competing paradigms; nor does it attempt to model a postmodern style or position. Likewise, I am not offering a critique of postmodernism. I should also point out that this essay addresses postmodernism as theory or philosophy, not necessarily as a

stylistic movement in art and architecture nor as a set of applications for the classroom.

Postmodernism Defined

Many intellectuals believe that postmodernism is currently changing the traditional forces and concepts and assumptions that shape social life and personal experience and knowledge. But just what is postmodernism? How could such a monolithic, pervasive movement be so nebulous, so hard to define and explain? Jean-Francois Lyotard, the French scholar, philosopher, and as author of The Postmodern condition: A Report on knowledge (1979), one of the major figures in the development of postmodern theory writes "simplifying in the extreme, I define postmodernism as incredulity toward metanarratives (1979, xxiv).

Great! There we have it "simplified in the extreme." But what, then is a metanarrative and why should we harbor suspicions of one? For that matter, what is a narrative?

The latter question is straightforward enough. A narrative is simply a story, a discourse, a text—as in literature. However, there are broader implications of the term for a discussion of postmodernism. The postmodern position is that knowledge is made up of narratives; stories constructed in a continuing discourse among participants. This applies to

literature, certainly; but surprisingly, it also applies to science, the arts, and education—any field or type of knowledge. Participants in those fields are scientists, artists, and educators, respectively. The point is that knowledge is not static or given; it is constructed in a discourse among participants. This discourse is governed by a particular set of rules, which usually apply only to the particular field of knowledge. The rules for making scientific knowledge differ from those for making art knowledge. This set of rules is a metanarrative. A metanarrative is another story or discourse constructed to explain or verify or illuminate other stories. Metanarrative is comprehensive and should be understood as the final criteria for verifying a narrative's worth or truth. Metanarrative is sometimes derisively called "totalizing" by postmodern adherents because it presumes to offer absolute knowledge and final truth.

Postmodern theory focuses on knowledge and meaning and the role of language in the development of knowledge and meaning. One of postmodern theory's primary concerns is epistemology, the branch of philosophy concerned with answering the questions "How do we know what we know?" and "What are the bases for our truth-claims?" and "How can our way of knowing and knowledge be verified or legitimated?" and "Is one form of knowledge superior to another form?" Postmodernism shapes

knowledge and ways of knowing in different ways than other cultural paradigms.

As educators, we are also vitally concerned with epistemology, especially when we ask the central question of curriculum, "What content should we teach?"

I believe that the postmodern paradigm opens the possibilities for the legitimization of artistic intelligence or art and aesthetics as ways of knowing. Certainly art shapes an individual's knowledge and values in the visual literacy sense: consider how the great art and architecture commissioned and sponsored by the Catholic Church created, inspired, and visually reinforced its dogma, stories, values in the minds of believers, especially before the era of widespread literacy. But also, art contains society's accumulated knowledge and culture. As educators, we should be vitally concerned with epistemology, philosophy, theory, and the ways and content of knowledge if we are to participate in the development of answers to the question, "What should we teach?" We should be proactive and informed in participating in this discourse. If not, we abdicate professional responsibility to the directives of remote experts.

Postmodernism as a Paradigm

Postmodernism is a paradigm. It may be useful to recall that a paradigm is a group of cultural and intellectual ideas, values, and assumptions, that operates more or less unconsciously or behind the scenes in people's lives. The purpose of these ideas and assumptions is to keep us from having to reinvent the wheel every time we try to communicate with one another or educate one another or conduct science, make art, music and so on. A paradigm tells us what "fits" and what does not fit in such contexts as our daily lives and in a field of knowledge like social studies or art or science. It tells us what is legitimate scientific knowledge and what is not; it tells us what is "good art" and what is not. The paradigm is like shared knowledge or common sense or cultural context. A dictionary definition might be something like "the conceptual framework that authorizes or supports explanation and inquiry in a field of knowledge." By definition then, educators should be interested in how paradigms work because they are interested in how human knowledge is made. (Yes, ***made***; not given.)

Several things to know about paradigms: they are loosely organized sets of ideas, values, and assumptions about "the way things are," not logical lists or recipes or engineering plans. In fact, the ideas or beliefs that make up a paradigm are knit together like family resemblances — members of a

family may resemble one another, may have the same color hair and similar height, etc. But the parts of a paradigm do not have to be like identical twins. They may differ individually. Also, paradigms are relative. Some words, the word "tall," for instance, can mean different heights when applied to skyscapers and to people. How tall is tall, anyway? One writer, Lofti Zadeh, used the charming term "fuzzy set" to describe this type of relationship. Paradigms are fuzzy sets of ideas, values, and assumptions. Postmodernism may affect literature in a different way than visual arts. The Renaissance, for example, was a cultural paradigm with which we are all familiar. Renaissance art was not the same in the Netherlands as it was in Florence or France.

Another thing to know about paradigms in general is that they change. Like everything else, they develop and have a history. Thomas Kuhn wrote about this tendency to change in his 1962 book, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. He described paradigm changes or shifts as revolutions, that is change which is chaotic and cataclysmic, not smooth and orderly. Kuhn's views on change contrast with Hegel's simplified description of historical changes as a dialectical process composed of a thesis or idea, then the emergence of its antithesis or opposite, and then finally a synthesis or

merger of the two. Most thinkers today feel that Kuhn's explanation of change is more realistic.

To understand postmodern theory, then, you have to believe in paradigms. The histories of art, literature, music, and education are, to a certain extent, the histories of how they have been influenced or shaped by the prevailing paradigms throughout the ages.

Who makes the prevailing paradigm and where is it? Artists and art teachers understand that art, education, and many other social institutions do not take place in a vacuum. They are socially grounded. That is to say, they are constructed by particular people doing particular things at particular times in particular places. Neither art nor education just happens, disconnected from direct human experience. We actually make or construct our social institutions like art and education. They do not exist without the human activities that cause them to occur. Artists and art teachers and art students are part of what might be termed a social ecology. Recall that one of the main tenets of ecology in the scientific or biological sense is the concept of interrelatedness and interdependency. What happens to the habitat of one species has a significant impact on another species. The social construction of knowledge and the interrelatedness of human beings and their affairs are important themes of postmodernism.

Cultural Paradigms: A Brief History

Artists-teachers understand how broad-based cultural movements relate to art. They believe (and try to teach their students) that the art process operates within the context of a cultural paradigm rather than in a vacuum. It shapes and is shaped by broadly accepted cultural and social values. Art visualizes, translates, theorizes, forms meanings, uncovers, confronts, and challenges all in order to make art objects or events that somehow "belong to" a given cultural or intellectual mode. This is not to say that art always operates along a neat dialectic or is always logically integrated into one understanding, one voice and one grand narrative. They are, in fact, constructed in a social context rich with interactions, complexities, influences, causes, effects, possibilities, and impossibilities, like most other human enterprises.

Postmodern art and art pedagogy are parts of a socio-cultural "ecology" in which the dominant theme is connectedness. Postmodern art pedagogy also considers it better for artist-teachers to be explicitly committed to connectedness than to be governed by default by the modernist myths of the independent and self-referential art object and its legacy, a socio-culturally detached art would isolated from history and human transaction. More on modernism follows.

In our art history classes, we all learned about the Classical Period in Greek art. We may have learned that classicism also influenced Greek literature, law, political systems, architecture, music, and so on. Classicism pervaded the entire Greek culture and daily life like weft through the warp. We may recall that the main philosophical concept of Classicism was humanism, the belief that human life, experience, affairs, values, human physical beauty, etc., should be the central concerns of human beings. Greek sculpture shows the Classical fascination with celebrating the beauty and grace of the human figure. Human life was the ultimate value. As we know, Classicism re-appeared from time to time in history.

Another paradigm is associated with the next great age, the medieval period, or Dark Ages. Some scholars now use the term, "Age of Certainty." In western Europe, at least, this period was characterized by a de-emphasis on the value of human life on earth and replaced by absolute theocentrism, that is, a god-centered social order, and circumscribed rigidly by the dogma of the Catholic Church. It would simply never occur to the average person in the Age of Certainty to question the authority of the church or to doubt the beliefs it taught. Life on earth was not supposed to be pleasant; it was not valued. Compare Greek sculpture of the human figure with that of the medieval period. The latter crudely represents humans as graceless and

featureless. Paradigms thus influence individual experience in daily life as well as the social institutions like art and education.

The Renaissance is also a period of history organized as a paradigm. It was characterized, as we know, by a revival of Classicism's interest in human life, values, experience and affairs that began in 14th century Italy. It was an exciting time for artists and intellectuals, as we know. Like earlier paradigms, the Renaissance beliefs, values and concepts influenced art, literature, philosophy, religion, politics, and many other aspects of social life and individual experience.

Romanticism is an intellectual – cultural paradigm closer in time to our own. Artists in the nineteenth century spoke with many voices, but their tones were consistent. Romanticism was the dominant cultural-intellectual paradigm of the nineteenth century. The defining theme of Romanticism is the belief that the essence of human nature resides in the emotions, spirit, imagination and inner depths of the human psyche. This idea led to the nineteenth century developments of Freudian psychoanalytic theory and Romantic poetry. Freud concluded that internal emotions determined behavior. William Wordsworth (1770-1850) once defined poetry as the spontaneous welling up and overflow of powerful emotions. His friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) wrote that the greatest effect of

poetry occurs when the imagination substitutes a "sublime feeling of the unimaginable" for a real experience (Perkins, 1967).

We can trace the term "Romanticism" to 1798 when the German art and literacy critics Friedrich and August Von Schlegel used it to distinguish Medieval and Renaissance art and literature from that of Classical Greece and Rome. In drawing this distinction, the Von Schlegels argued that the art and literature that came after the classical era was legitimate and valuable even though the prevailing Neoclassical opinions of the their day regarded the art and culture of ancient Greece and Rome to be the high point of civilization. All that came afterwards, including the Renaissance, mapped a trajectory toward decay in its failure to meet the cultural standards the ancients had established.

In short, the Von Schlegel brothers sought to establish a new cultural ideal and to re-evaluate the "decadent" postclassical art and literature according to new cultural values, beliefs, and themes that would replace the critical standards based on values of the older classical paradigm. One of these Neoclassical postulates was that value in art rested exclusively on rules of form. For example, the familiar classical orders—the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian---followed strictly specified sets of rules governing art and architecture that had been generated to complement the religious beliefs and

practices of the classical Greek cultures. The new Romantic ideal rejected these limitations. Instead, Romantic art, like life itself, pursued infinite variety. Romantic artists considered themselves free to explore new subject matter and form instead of replication the aesthetic and critical standards of an earlier era.

David Perkins (1967), a scholar of the Romantic era, noted that the Von Schlegels intended their neologism ("like the Romans") to refer to artists of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, not necessarily their eighteenth and nineteenth century contemporaries. But the term came to define loosely the diverse cultural, artistic and literacy phenomenal of the nineteenth century.

According to Romanticism, the artistic impulse was a creative, emotional, intuitive force originating "within" the artist, who must, in turn, strive to manifest it externally through art. Thus, individual artistic freedom became the ultimate Romantic value.

Modernism, the cultural paradigm that succeeded Romanticism, defined the essence of human nature as the ability to reason. Social psychologist Kenneth Gergen (1991) isolated the scientific method as Modernism's principal theme or metaphor. With its emphasis on rigorous, detached observation and reason, science became the predominant means for

attaining worthwhile knowledge. Pushed to the extreme and then inverted, this tenet came to mean that knowledge without a scientific basis is worthless.

During the first third of the twentieth century the school of philosophy called "Logical Positivism" emerged to articulate the Modernism's intellectual agenda. In Vienna, a group of philosophers appropriately referred to as "The Vienna Circle" and including Rudolph Carnap and Moritz Schlick, formed a study group to advance the ideas of logical positivism. Logical positivists like A.J. Ayer regarded metaphysics as wrong turns on the path to knowledge, and Ayer enunciated the precepts of logical positivism in his 1936 book, *Language, truth, and logic*. Ayer regarded certain questions as improper because they could not be empirically verified. Accordingly, he subordinated the domains of philosophy, art, history, literature, and theology (all of them predominantly speculative or hermeneutic) to the "certainties" of scientific knowledge. He considered intuited understanding and knowledge based on tradition to be meaningless and therefore, deserving of marginalization. Any statement unsusceptible to verification—which is to say, unable to be proved true or false empirically---was without meaning (Honderich, 1995).

As you may recall, the Modernist paradigms' primary epistemological assumption is naïve realism, the belief that truth has an objective existence and can be known by observation in the physical world as it appears to the senses. Through observation, one can supply one's reason with data to process into knowledge. In such a process, sensory modes became mere conveyors of data, mere input devices serving the faculty of reason where the real work of knowing proceeds. To the Modernist, the idea of unknowable reality is nonsense. Magic, the soul, the spirit, and many aspects salient to art stand in stark contrast to Modernism' totalitarian, one-dimensional epistemology. A related modernist concept is the belief that facts are value-free observations.

Disconnecting from Modernism, Connecting to Postmodernism

One of the tenets of postmodern art pedagogy is that its participants embrace the contemporary art world. This entails recognizing, exploring, and coming to terms with postmodernism, both as a broad-based cultural paradigm and as a stylistic movement in art. It also entails understanding modernism's premises and how its limitations helped create and sustain the separation of art instruction in the public schools from the art world. This separation, of course, is a signature characteristic of traditional art education,

and one that postmodern art pedagogy marks for radical change. Hilton Kramer, editor of *The New Criterion*, a periodical dedicated to reviewing the arts and defending the status of high art against New Left and postmodernist literacy and art criticism, was regarded for many years as the high priest of conservative modernist criticism. Even Kramer (1982) finally acknowledged in his essay, "Postmodern: Art and Culture in the 1980s," that modernism has lost its place as the currency of our culture to the emerging postmodern paradigm.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, the French cultural philosopher, wrote in his 1984 book, The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge, that the task for postmodern artists is less to provide a representation of reality or even reality itself than to invent metaphors for reality so as to open otherwise inaccessible and inexpressible domains of human experience.

Questioning Modernism in Art

So if there is a postmodernism, there must have been a modernism. Indeed there was, or more correctly, there ***is*** a modernism. People often use the words modern and contemporary interchangeably. Yet they are not the same, as we shall see. And we will compare and contrast postmodernism with modernism and other paradigms. To fully understand postmodernism,

we must thorough understand modernism. The two paradigms are antagonistic.

For the visual arts, Modernism's belief in the independence of the art object became its defining characteristic. By the end of the nineteenth century, art concerned itself less and less with mimetically representing nature. Its aim shifted away from pictorial illusionism. A painting no longer provided a window on the world. Such artistic conventions as precise contour lines, linear perspective, chiaroscuro, and so forth, developed for representing three-dimensional objects in two dimensions, no longer found as much use under the influences of the Modernist cultural paradigm. If the art object was to be independent, it required no validation according to how closely it resembled the "out there" world.

For Manet and Cezanne, art created its own reality. The physical properties of the art object itself became the compelling interest. The art object became decontextualized. Its value was intrinsic, independent of the world. Impressionists interested themselves mainly in the effects of light and the surfaces of their paintings. The surface of the painting was most important. Its formal properties were more important than the content or the references to the real world or other external meanings to which the painting referred.

In his book, The Saturated Self, Kenneth Gergen (1991) supplied another guiding metaphor to understand Modernism: the machine. The nineteenth century industrial revolution's wave had crested and had begun to ebb by the advent of the modern era, leaving behind both a deeply ingrained reliance on the machine and the tendency to exalt it. After all, the machine was the both the result and the tool of science. Machines were "rational."

Art and literature have made abundant use of this metaphor. The Bauhaus epitomized the linkage between art, the art education establishment, and industrialization, its very aim being to produce artist-designers who could exploit the design style that industrial processes and the machine metaphor suggested. Modernist architecture, as well, reflected the machine aesthetic. Le Corbusier (Charles Edouard Jeanneret) in his 1931 book, *Towards a New Architecture*, referred to the house as a machine a habiter (" a machine to live in").

The machine aesthetic aptly expressed the prime Modernist value of independence. Many of our modern machines operate in the absence of human attendance: telephones, water heaters, refrigerators, fax machines, and many more, seem to run entirely on their own like Hal, the soulless in Stanley Kubrick's film, *2001: A Space Odyssey.*

The machine imagery extends to modernist conceptions of personality and intelligence. Behaviorism, the stolidly Modernist psychological perspective, conceptualizes such constructs as the personality, learning, and intelligence as controlled, operated, shaped—or, if you will, "manufactured" ---by the environment. As circumscribed by behaviorism, the personality exists only as observable behavior consisting of responses to stimuli reveals it. Stimuli are buttons and levers that control reactions.

Another aspect of the machine analogy is that human characteristics like personality and learning are coherent and consistent—that is to say, they operate rationally and display a more or less fixed set of traits that characterize the individual over time. This assumption, fundamental to standardized testing and associated practices like ability tracking in the schools, guided the Tylerian approach to education that conceived of learning in terms of movement along a fixed liner sequence marked by specified and observable educational outcomes. Postmodern theory, notably, denies the stability of the self (Gergen, 1991). The concept of the unstable self is embodied in the work of postmodern artist Cindy Sherman, who "casts" herself in make-believe roles and creates poster-like photographs inspired by movie stills. Likewise, psychologist Harry Stack Sullivan theorized that the individual is a dynamic composition of a

multitude of influences rather than a single programmed essence or stable identity.

One of Modernism's cherished myths is the idea of progress in art. Modernists accepted the presence of a Euclidean-like fixed point "out there" toward which art and artists inexorably move. Moreover, this point corresponds to a set of conditions categorically better than those of the past and present. Modernist art historiography presumes that art proceeds ever more efficiently toward some fixed, ideal, ultimate, best *end art* (Danto, 1997). One can find many parallels between this modernist concept of progress and science; they are contemporaneous denominations of the same cultural currency.

One of the philosophical foundations of Modernism, naïve realism, asserts a reality that exists independent of our perceptions of the physical world. Sometimes advocates of postmodern sensibilities refer semi-facetiously to this external reality as "out there." The roots of realism trace back to the philosophy of Rene Descartes (1596-1650), who postulated an eternal schism between mind and body, a binary opposition that led to the dichotomy between the subjective and the objective realms that persists today. The same unfortunate false dichotomy prevails over the issue of theory versus practice.

The logic of objectivity requires that tangible, perceptible objects occupy fixed points in time and space and operate according to principles of logic and science can reveal. The objective realm remains stable in the sense that, assuming their normality, different persons will experience the characteristics of objects in essentially the same ways. Everyone, for example, perceives a ripe Winesap apple red. That an apple is red is an objective fact in modernism. Everyone, it is assumed, sees it the same way. That the apple is red is only an observation in postmodernism. The observation may differ in a different context.

But certain problems perturb the epistemology of Modernism. Ironically, science and the culture of positivism, those twin pillars of the Modernist paradigm, also unravel Modernism's fraying edges. From physics, the Heisenberg Uncertainly Principle provides disconcerting evidence that objects long assumed (logically) to have tangible, immutable, physical objective existence may actually be changed by being observed or measured. Werner Heisenberg (1958), a German physicist, observed that some subatomic particles change their behavior in response to being measured so that they occupy different places at same instant. This observation contradicts principles so essential to realist and science-based thought systems. Heisenberg's findings suggest that physical objects react

differently to different forms of measurement. We can also take his observation to mean that characteristics of an entity can depend on perspective---that is, how and where we observe something influences what we determine about its nature. Interestingly enough, physics produced a finding artists and art teachers have long known, the color of the Winesap apple actually depends on the color balance of the light that illuminates it. Try looking at an apple under a sodium vapor streetlight and then under tungsten illumination of, say, the lamp inside a refrigerator. Red is not always red.

Paradigm Shifts

To return to Thomas Kuhn's theories, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions further questioned Modernism's glorification of objective knowledge by carefully tracing scientific change. Seminal changes in science, Kuhn observed, occur not in smoothly functioning, dispassionate, rational, neatly dialectical steps. Instead, scientific knowledge changes come by ragged jerks he called "paradigm shifts." A scientific paradigm is a small-scale equivalent to such broad-based cultural movements as Romanticism or Neoclassicism discussed earlier. It is a general set of more or less consistent and often implicit assumptions that constitute a perspective, style, or way to recognize data and make knowledge. It

amounts to a predisposition to interpret observations about the world in certain ways. For example, educators who believe in intelligence as a single, unified trait share the same paradigm and they develop strategies of instruction and forms of authorized knowledge that reflect their belief. A paradigm shift occurs when enough contradictory evidence accumulates among a sizable number of scholars or practitioners to oust one belief and install another. The challenge that Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligence posses to the construct of intelligence as a general, unified, innate capacity to learn exemplifies a paradigm shift currently underway in education and psychology.

As paradigms change, some people cling like shipwreck survivors to the old paradigm. Some people in the avant garde rush ahead to subvert the old paradigm and embrace the uncertainty of the new. Kuhn never spoke of absolute scientific proof. Instead, he saw "true scientific facts" as observations believers in a particular paradigm consider sensible---that is, consistent with the paradigm's assumptions and its criteria for truth. Scientific observations depend on particular perspectives or predisposition, like Heisenberg's findings and the discovery that an object's color changes according on the nature of its illumination. Scientists who measure phenomena quantitatively stay within he quantitative paradigm. Scholars

who make interpretations based on lived experiences as expressed by their subjects subscribe to the qualitative paradigm.

Critiquing Modernism

As we examine how cultural paradigms influence art and how we teach art, the realization emerges that as a human phenomenon, art is linked in important ways to other human phenomena. We realize from this concept of connectedness that the modernist doctrine of the independent, self-validating art object moribund. It seems counterintuitive, no longer obvious, that art is self-validating and beyond contextual determination. Instead, like other human phenomena, art both creates and is created by the entirety of he culture. In the caves of Altamira and Lascaux, art, shamanist ritual, food gathering and hunting, and other aspects of tribal life were brought together in a complex, symbiotically interrelated system made visible on cave walls. Like ritual, hunting and eating, art was an interwoven strand of communal life. So it is in the postmodern era.

With its celebration of philosophical realism and the scientific method as sources of truth, Modernism has had an enormous influence on art and art education. Modernism in art had two central tenets. First, art objects must be autotelic---they must stand alone. An artwork should not depend on external validation, but only on itself for authenticity and aesthetic value.

For instance, art should not be required to conform to strictures concerning usefulness, tradition, technical processes, prescribed or proscribed content, ideology, moral stipulations, or artistic intent. These autonomous entities strike their own terms for legitimacy. Art objects exist "out there" on their own.

Its second tenet holds that aesthetic value and aesthetic experience should be objectively verifiable and subject to the logic of cause and effect. They should be related to the art object in knowable ways. The reliance on and implicit glorification of logical and scientific forms of knowledge is unmistakable here. If the art object is objectively independent, the critical and aesthetic judgements about it can be value-free and verifiable, just like scientific facts. It follows that critics and viewers of art should also be objective and free from bias or ideological commitment. Critical and aesthetic statements, if they are to be valid under Modernist assumptions, should be confined to descriptions of a work's formal elements: line, shape or form, texture, value and color, etc. Modernist art dissociates itself from the social world where such supposedly irrelevant aspects as political, ethical, mystical, or economic ramifications interact to influence art's value and significance.

From a critical perspective, these Modernist tenets have had the unfortunate consequence of establishing and perpetuating the very conditions under which art and art education become marginalized in society and its schools. The separation of the art object from the web of contexts in which it is produced and experienced amounts to the installation of meaninglessness as a criterion for its success. Denial is ordained as accomplishment. We should therefore regard the confinement of art instruction to the margins of the curriculum as neither a surprise nor an accident. It is perfectly consistent with Modernism's concept of art; art and artists are essentially anti-social and decontextualized.

The doctrine of the pure, independent art object that relies only on itself for validation means that art must exist outside the mainstream. To fulfill its role as part of the larger institution of schooling, art education has had to remain aloof from the Modernist art world, glimpsing its visage from a safe distance, but paying tribute by training suppressed students to replicate its archive. Art education's great dilemma in the Modernist era has been how to invite participation in education's mission of acculturating future generations while maintaining the semblance of allegiance to Modernist art principles that work against its own mission. The art education establishment has been able to accomplish neither very well, and

it has created a school art world that tends to offer an insipid, but safe, Authorized Version of high art, thereby maintaining separation from the contemporary art world. Traditional art educators pledge allegiance to the archive, like the canon in literature, that list of art works deemed to be masterpieces. Along with those masterpieces, the archive includes the authorized versions of the criticism and art history of those masterpieces. In focusing exclusively on the archive, traditional art educators abdicate responsibility and forego the opportunity to participate in the curriculum question, "What should we teach?" They also download experts' opinions of those works value and meaning, often disavowing the place of their students' personal experience with art works. Note that postmodern principles do not throw out the art works of the archive; they throw out the concept of the archive by denying its exclusivity and challenging the authority and privilege to regulate it and enforce compliance with its standards.

Mainstream art education (it is really a contradiction in terms) has impaled itself on both horns of its dilemma by adopting Modernist principles that relegate it to the margins of both the world of art and the world of education. It has, in effect, defined itself as a marginal member of the educational establishment and as awkwardly embarrassing distant cousin of

the contemporary art world. The recent attempts of the DBAE movement to raise art education into the ranks of mainstream disciplines fail to urge that art education embrace the art world of its time and cast off its Modernist constraints. Remember that art is dangerous knowledge. It can be powerful and destabilizing. As dangerous knowledge, art linked to the contemporary art may be viewed by those clinging to the Modernist paradigm as a security risk and a target for external control. No wonder, then, that art remains a minor player in the curriculum.

Modernism developed its credo of the autonomous art object into the doctrine of "art for art's sake, " and in so doing denied the legitimate art object a utilitarian function, then excluded objects with utilitarian functions from art. Modern art might well possess intellectual, political, economic, social, philosophical, even domestic decorative functions, but these qualities exist outside the aesthetic experience of the art object. Only art's formal elements elicit aesthetic experience according to Modernism.

In fact, from the Modernist perspective, utilitarian functions may be so distracting as to prevent aesthetic experience. This doctrine implicitly denies legitimacy to the rich world of craft—ceramics, glass, woodworking, weaving, jewelry, and so on. Likewise, women's art, much of the art produced by ethnic minorities and racial groups, and the so-called "naïve,"

"outsider" art and folk arts are devalued or excluded. Modernism's disdain for these art forms has changed how their practitioners produce them. Seeking inclusion in the selective and remunerative art world, they adopt such Modernist forms of expression, stylistic elements, and conventions as abstraction and expressionism, leaving behind their traditions, contexts, and connections with contemporary life.

Modernism never conceived of art as a socially situated practice, but rather as an individual expression of the artist's unique inner force---the *terribilita*, creativity, inspiration, and so forth. Only the few possessed of such rare qualities can achieve "real" art. So why teach it all in the public schools and colleges?

The Modernist insistence on an aesthetic purity untainted by utilitarian function enfeebles art as an expression of the very cultural paradigm that produced it. Thus, the Modernist impulse fails to address today's concerns about bringing multiple voices and diverse experiences into the discourses on education in general and art education in particular. Postmodern art pedagogy, in fact, sees little potential in an art or art education divorced from the social, political, ideological discourses of the contemporary art world.

Connecting Art Pedagogy to Postmodernism

To visualize and enact a postmodern art pedagogy, we must recognize the value of relating art education as practiced in today's schools to the art world exists and thrives in today's postmodern culture. A postmodern arts pedagogy seeks engagement with both past and present art worlds. But this engagement entails confronting art in the active context of the socio-cultural paradigm that nourishes our awareness of art's significance rather than in an isolation contrived for safe school consumption. Engaging art in the schools with the contemporary art world means an active and conscious association with postmodernism.

A description of postmodernism, or any previous cultural paradigm, should proceed with a caveat that cultural paradigms are far from neatly bound, homogenous absolutes and that their defining characteristics are more like family resemblances than necessary-and-sufficient criteria. Postmodernism conceives of reality and knowledge as socially constructed. People actively create meaning through interactions in the social sphere. This conception naturally challenges the Modernist-positivist objectivity, the credo of separation between the knower and the known, and the insistence on value-neutral judgements and absolutist knowledge.

Postmodernism invites many voices into this social construction of knowledge, reality, and value. It values diversity for its tendency to broaden and deepen the construction process. Multiple sources of truth and knowledge construct constellations of meaning instead of a single, unified version to be adopted as truth to the exclusion of competing observations.

To the postmodern mind, knowing is not an act of discerning a core essence or assimilation a set of necessary, ideal forms. Granting legitimacy to multiple versions of reality and the many voices of truth—and in our case, many visions of art and artistic value—defies established authority, subverts the hierarchy of the archive and diminishes its powerful influence on our art worlds. It undermines tradition and redefines the terms for rationality, logic, and "common sense" formerly constructed under the terms of the Modernist-positivist paradigm.

As a resource for art pedagogy, the postmodern theory of knowledge recognizes the relationship between power and knowledge and, for our purposes here, between power and artistic value. Earlier cultural paradigms, Romanticism and Modernism, failed to emphasize, let alone acknowledge, these relationships. Every field—art, literature, even science, with its reputation for objective truth-seeking methods, is vulnerable to the often tacit intrusions of those power interests that would shape it. In other words,

every subject area, every division of human knowledge, contains implicit codes that can serve the interests of the powerful at the expense of others.

Michel Foucault (1970, 1972) identified two epistemological misconceptions that have produced pervasive distortions not only in philosophy and other academic areas, but also in the ways humans act, perceive, and conceptualize their experience. One misconception is that knowledge is objective and will be conclusively discovered in the due course of human intellectual endeavor. A second misconception is that knowledge is both value-free and independent of power. Foucault's succinct statements critique Modernism's epistemological assumptions. Reversed, these assumptions are declarations of the epistemological principles of postmodernism: (1) knowledge is inherently subjective and socially constructed and (2) knowledge is value-laden and shaped by power interests. As such, these tenets are more than just applicable to art and art education, they strengthen the foundations of critical art pedagogy.

In the art world, two overarching characteristics of postmodernism are its determined repudiation of Modernist cultural and artistic values as ideals and its deliberate refusal to install alternative ideals to replace exhausted Modernist forms (Janson, 1995). Manifestations of postmodernism in the art world sometimes lack logic and coherence---and often intentionally so.

Postmodernist art has not been deducted from first principles nor does it systematically follow from higher, universal principles. Instead, postmodern art traverses richly pluralistic terrains in which no one style or aesthetic approach or material or technique eclipses any other. According to postmodernism, the world presents texts with multiple interpretations both possible and preferable.

Postmodern art reveals an abiding impulse to challenge power and authority in all forms. In particular, it contests exclusionary versions of reality and truth claims presented as final and ultimate. Truth with a capitol T is untenable. In "postmodernspeak", presuming to speak from the position of ultimate truth earns the derisive epithet "grand narrative." A suspicion of authority often enters postmodern art and literary criticism, and it tends to manifest itself as calls to reject the binary oppositions, that is, the dichotomies between Author/reader, Artist/viewer, Teacher/student, Expert/layman. Postmodern scholars sometimes refer to the Modernist-positivist tendency to think in bipolar, hierarchical terms as the politics, or the "aesthetics of difference." For example, the aesthetics of difference has led to the presumption that Western art is inherently superior to the art of distant cultures and unfamiliar ethnic groups.

Postmodernism is skeptical of the claims and assumptions that scientific knowledge, logic, and reason surpass all other forms of knowledge, especially intuition, art and aesthetic knowing, fantasy, and mysticism. Reflecting the influence of such post-positivist philosophies as critical theory, postmodernism views the privileged forms of knowing as sources of oppression to be subverted in tie struggle against social injustice. Postmodernism remains open to mystifying, and even inconsistent ways of knowing and valuing to accomplish this end.

Other characteristics of postmodern art include the abandonment of formalist issues and mimesis-based rules governing artistic production and artistic value. In Janson's (1995) formulation, postmodernism holds that through Modernism's influence, the art world became a tool for large-scale corporate capitalism. Postmodernism, however, authorizes no new rules. Artists and writers are free to play and wordplay, parody, pastiche appear frequently in postmodern art and literature. The use of non-traditional, occasionally surprising materials in the production of art is another characteristic, along with wild appropriations from previous art styles and well-known art objects from the archive and from such non-art sources as mass communication and printed materials. Postmodern artists freely commander elements of old art and non-art to configure new possibilities.

Postmodern thought relocates aesthetic value from the formal, stylistic, and iconic properties of the particular art object to the viewer's experience of the art objet. This transaction constructs aesthetic value. The encounter of art and its definition and experience as art by a particular individual constitutes the locus of aesthetic value.

A Sampling of Postmodern Art Artists

Postmodern architecture rests on a critique of the tendencies of the modern international styles of architecture to search for universal architectural ideals. Postmodern architecture believes this search to be futile. Postmodern architecture reinserts the human scale and such qualities as surprise and whimsy. The architectural firms of Sites Projects, Inc., and Maple-Jones Associates collaborated to design a showroom for Best Stores in Houston in 1975, and they produced a radical parody of commercial architecture's banality. The Best Stores Showroom is basically a huge, windowless, off-white, brick box in an asphalt parking lot on the Texas flatland. The most obvious detail is the façade's surprising roofline, which resembles a partially destroyed ruin or a bombed-out building in a war zone. The jagged roof line of raw, jutting, uneven, unfinished bricks tumbles irregularly from the highest corner at the left façade to both adjacent corners like a plunging line on an EKG graphing a patient's abrupt decline or the

bad news business report that may have caused the heart attack to begin with. Above the building's main entrance starting at the top of the front wall contiguous with the jagged roofline, one sees a stunning, wound-like, V-shaped breach from which an irregular mound of bricks has accumulated on the top of the porch roof. The bricks appear to have been poured from within, a positive space that forms an inverse of the negative space of the V-shaped breach. This element suggests that the explosion came from within the building itself. Was the cause simply the passage of time or a cataclysm, natural or unnatural, deserved or undeserved? Does it symbolize the demise of modernist-inspired, box-like commercial architecture, or perhaps the collapse of modernism itself? Is the Best Stores Showroom a ruin? Or a monumental practical joke? Or a definitive postmodern architectural statement? It is all three, and perhaps more.

Installations, an increasingly popular genre of postmodern sculpture, are, of course, art environments as opposed to art objects: three-dimensional areas or scenes constructed in galleries, museums, or almost anywhere, They are usually temporary. For example, Ilya Kabakov constructed *The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment* at the Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York in 1988. Somewhat reminiscent of the Best Stores Showroom, the installation's conceit is that a man has been catapulted through the

ceiling into space, leaving behind his shoes, bed, and an eclectic collection of posters and other art on the walls. Debris, detritus, and other elements of a general mess from the explosive egress are arrayed haphazardly throughout the installation. The means of expulsion, a catapult of springs, leather harnesses and ropes hangs limply from the edges of the gaping, jagged-edged hole in the ceiling. The strangely low-tech catapult is oddly incongruent with twentieth century Space Age technology, whether conceived in science fiction or by NASA. The installation describes a fantasy, the three-dimensional story of a dream that came true and the banality that ensued.

But Kabokov's work is a text that began as a private experience, and no single meaning or testimony is apparent. A viewer must interpret the text. It is, however, an amusing coincidence that in the early decades of the twentieth century, Kabokov's fellow Russian, Suprematist artist Kasimir Malevich (1878-1935) once declared himself "President of Space" (Gablik, 1984). Malevich's *Black Quadrilateral*, (ca. 1913) and his *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918) stands as ultimate Modernist abstractions. Both are simple rectangles (or approximately so) on neutral backgrounds. Elegant abstractions or supreme banality?

The ubiquitous postmodern strategy of appropriation appears most radically in the grand art medium of painting. Mark Tansey's *Derrida Queries DeMan* features a depiction of an encounter between Jacques Derrida, the French deconstructionist philosopher, and Paul DeMan, the postmodern literary critic who applied and popularized many of Derrida's ideas in the U.S. Tansey's work emphasizes the role of deconstruction as a principal foundation of both postmodern epistemology and its fledgling, critical art padagogy. Tansey borrowed---copied, actually—his image from a commercial illustration of a desperate fight between Sherlock Holmes and his nemesis, the nefarious Dr. Moriarty. The two struggle at the misty edge of a dangerous precipice. Either or both could plunge to their deaths in the abyss between two rocky cliffs. (In Conan Doyle's story, his hero, Sherlock Holmes dies. But the author resurrected Holmes in response to popular demand.)

Another curious postmodern device appears in Tansey's painting. The rock faces of two cliffs are covered with script, actual quotations from writings on the subject of deconstruction. One takes Tansey's point to be the questioning of relationships between the image and the word, between the illustration and the idea, between the printed word as a visual symbol and the printed picture as a visual symbol. Which is the higher form of

reality? Is the print part of Tansey's image or is the image completed somehow by the print? Are the ideas true referenced by the print the meaning of the artwork? True to the postmodern mind-set, Tansy furnishes only the mystery, not the (re)solution.

Another postmodern artist known for juxtaposing print and pictorial images, the photographer Barbara Kruger typically exhibits large-scale photographer Barbara Kruger typically exhibits large-scale photographic images to which she adds terse messages or slogans in stark block print. Her messages tend to be stridently confrontational, ideological, ambiguous, or sarcastic commentaries on social issues, especially gender bias and feminist concerns. Kruger represents the strand of postmodern art that is most closely associated with critical theory and critical art pedagogy's interests in social criticism, social justice, compassion, and protest. She frequently uses stereotypical images from the mass media to address the issue of how gender-specific knowledge and meaning are reproduced in society. One of her works features the message "I Shop, Therefore I Am, " an ironic corruption of the Cartesian duality used sarcastically to underscore one way the popular and consumer cultures stereotype women. Another of her works warns, "Don't Buy Me With Apologies."

Cindy Sherman also works with photographic images in postmodern ways. She stages scenes reminiscent of old Hollywood movie stills originally used for advertising. She usually assumes the role of a central character in the scene, suggesting the concept of the self or identity as an invented reality and contesting the presumption that the self and personality are stable, innate continuous entities in human beings. Her work also raises such feminist issues as how film and mass media construct stereotyped roles for women. For example, typical, traditional Hollywood fare portrays women as weak damsels in distress awaiting a strong male rescuer. Like other postmodern artists, Sherman poses questions but supplies no answers.

Scholar Suzi Gablik (1991) identified a significant strand of postmodern art, the project of rebuilding of reawakening art's transformational power at both the societal and individual levels. In *The Reenchantment of Art,* she argued that the art world of Modernism, capitalism and positivism is moribund, arid alienated from human experience. The search for reenchantment, she suggested, begins with reinvesting art with ritual and assigning to it the function of creating a cohesive community through participation in a shared sense of meaning, value and mystery. She concluded that art could retrain us as dreamers and conscious mythologizers.

One can detect an optimistic strand of postmodernism in Gablik's work. One of her themes is that postmodern art can assume a role in healing. She called this function "reconstructive postmodernism, " as opposed to postmodernism's deconstructionist element, which prompts a more pessimistic view evident from its reliance on fatalist rhetoric. As an example of reconstructive postmodernist art, and particularly its emphasis on ritual, Gablik cited the performance art of Chicago artist Fern Shaffer. On the winter solstice, December 22, the weather is nearly always bitterly cold in Chicago. But on that day, Shaffer performs a ritual cleansing of crystals on the shore of Lake Michigan. She has, of course, invented this ritual, in which she dances in a free form manner at dawn among the organic shapes of ice formations that have accumulated at the water edge. Shaffer dresses in a magic costume invented for the ritual. It is covered by many strands of raffia, rather like dreadlocks. She ascribes no particular meaning to her rituals other than that of creating an awareness of the possibilities of a visionary mode of thinking. She intends to create an experience of magic, myth and ritual that resists the traditional limitations of rationality.

The subtext of healing appears subtly in the work of German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) along with the typical postmodern characteristic of using nontraditional art materials. Janson (1995) called Beuys "the first

postmodern artist." In World War II, his plane was shot down over the Crimea during the cold winter of 1943. He survived the crash only to face death by freezing. He was found nearly dead by Tartars, who wrapped his body in sheep fat and felt to bring his temperature back to normal. Later, as an artist, Beuys produced sculptures made of these two materials. He explained that he wanted to produce a form of aesthetics based on beauty and optimal realism. Instead, he wanted to produce a form of aesthetic experience and value and nature of a substance is redefined through its embodiment as art.

The environmental art of Andy Goldsworthy further illustrates the healing theme of reconstructive postmodernism. Goldsworthy's work is partly sculptural, partly performance, partly installation. He works in natural settings like fields, rocky mountainsides, and forest, even the North Pole. He fashions an artwork from whatever materials he finds on the site: leaves, flowers, rocks, grass, ice. He seldom uses tools or implements of any kind. His intriguing arches of sticks, woven strands of leaves or grass or flowers eventually blow away, and photographs remain the only records of his art. Goldsworthy's art remains part of the landscape in which it was made, its very impermanence contributing to the creation of it abiding value. The artist returns his authority to nature along with the objects he creates.

Some Implications of Postmodern Theory for DBAE

Production:

- explore non-traditional materials and construction methods
- explore alternative art forms and the art forms of different cultural groups
- question the primacy of design theory in art production; question the primacy of art fundamentals

Aesthetics

- question the basis for the archive and the instructional practices of downloading experts' opinions as exclusive content for art classes
- focus on student experience of encountering an art work and the formation of meanings and value judgments about it
- open the question of the relationship between the symbol and the symbolized to multiple interpretations
- Interrogate the assumption that aesthetic value is located in the art object
- Let meaning join beauty at the center of aesthetic discourse.

- Art History
- Interrogate official versions written by old white men and invite new voices to propose different account for change in art
- question the assumptions of traditional art history
- Look for postmodern themes such as connectedness and multiplicity in art and its relationship to society.

- Art Criticism
- Construct a dialogue about the value of a particular art work in the context of an individual's experience with it
- question the criteria for value in art

question the rules by which someone becomes eligible to act as an art critic.

APPENDIX A

A Comparative Profile of Tenets of Modernism and Postmodernism:

Modernism

Metaphor: the machine

Sources of Knowledge: science, logical positivism, rationality, cause-effect, behaviorism, quantitative research, operationalism and reductionism

Philosophy: Naïve realism

Art and Aesthetics: the art object is independent from context and self-referential, aesthetic value is a property of the art object.

Postmodernism

Central tenet: suspicion of metanarrative

Themes: the relative nature of knowledge, connectedness, multiplicity, social ecology, the social construction of reality

Methods of Knowledge-making: deconstruction, semiotics, cognitive psychology, multiple sources of knowledge, qualitative research, knowledge as narrative and discourse.

APPENDIX B

TERMS

Culture: the total social institutions, beliefs, language, practices, discourses, narrative, codes for behavior, knowledge of a group of people.

Phenomenology: A school of philosophy associated with German Philosopher Edmund Hussar in the early 20th century. It emphasizes the importance of individual experiences in the formation of knowledge. Further, phenomenology asserts that the individual's point of view is a primary factor in shaping that individual's experience—and knowledge—of a phenomenon or object. That is, we perceive only the aspects of a phenomenon or object that are presented to us at our individual station point. From the present and perceived aspects, we form our knowledge of the phenomenon or objects' reality and essence.

Epistemology: the branch of philosophy that concerns itself with the nature and verification of knowledge. It asks how do we know what we know and how do we form "truth claims" and support or verify them.

Realism, especially, naïve realism: the school of philosophy that believes that our perceptions of phenomena and objects in the world are direct, unmediated, and unaffected by our own consciousness or subjective states. Naïve realism believes that events and objects are "out there" and exist truly as we see and experience them, given normal perceptions. Naïve realism implies objectivity, the concept that there is one correct version of perceptible objects or events and that everyone can discern, see, or experience this version the same way. Naïve realism is contrasted with idealism, which holds that knowledge and experience the world is indirect and that what we know of the world is dependent on mental processing. Perception must take place before reality. Postmodernists discredit Naïve realism.

Positivism: The belief that science, logic, and rationalism are the highest forms of knowledge and offer the only paths to truth. Postmodernists see this belief as a dangerous exaggeration perpetuated by a cult of academicians and the cause of many of our current social and environmental ills.

Cognitive psychology: A school of psychology that studies thinking, perceiving, emotions, and other human activities and faculties attributed to

the mind. William James in the late 19th century and Jerome Bruner in the mid-20th century are important cognitive psychologists who have influenced educational thought.

Behaviorism: contrasting with cognitive psychology, behaviorism is the school of psychology associated with B.F. Skinner and the stimulus-response theory of learning and operant conditioning. Behaviorism holds that observable behavior is the only important source of information in psychology. The concept of the mind, which cannot be observed, is not a valid concern. Nor is thinking. The behaviorist position is incompatible with the concept of free will because behaviorism sees human behavior as determined by stimuli. Learning is explained as responding in appropriate ways to stimuli. It is incompatible also with postmodern thinking.

Semiotics: Semiotics is a 19th and 20th century field of study very important to postmodernism. Semiotics is the study of signs, that is, the relationship between a symbol and the thing, quality or meaning to which it refers. The symbol is called the *signifier* and its referent is called the *signified*. The most important concept of semiotics for postmodernism is the principle that

the relationship between the signifier and the signified is open. That is, it is subject to interpretation and can change. It is relative. C.S. Pierce, and Ferdinand de Saussure are semiotics important figures.

Text: It is important to note the influence of the principle of semiotics to the postmodern concept of the text. Text usually refers to the written word. But in postmodern thought, everything is a text and is interpretable as such. An artwork, scientific finding, music, law, stories are all texts to be interpreted individually in experience with them. The privilege of interpretation of a text does not belong exclusively to the author or painter or critic.

The canon and archive: are the lists of masterpieces (canon for literature, archive for art) deemed worthy of study and preservation by expert critics and scholars. Postmodernism denies the privilege implicitly granted to the archive by traditional art education practices. While not throwing out the archive, postmodernism upholds the merit of individual meaning formed in direct experience with a work of art. Art is text.

Deconstruction: The central tenet of deconstruction is the denial of a fixed center from which to create knowledge or truth or ultimate value. Deconstruction is a method of knowledge-making that is a primary force in postmodern thought. The originator of deconstruction is Jacques Derrida, a contemporary French philosopher who introduced his ideas in the U.S. in the 1969's. Deconstruction creates meaning by challenging unjust hierarchies of value and asymmetrical power relationships that pervade our culture and produce distorted patters of belief, thought, and behavior. These hierarchies and relationships are called "binary oppositions." Binary oppositions usually exist implicitly in our culture or assumptions about the "way things are." A binary opposition is composed of a privileged member and a subordinate member. An example is the binary opposition of SACRED GROUND/profane ground. "Sacred ground refers to any beautiful, scenic area regarded as worthy of preservation. Yellowstone National Park is an example. Profane ground is scrubland which is unattractive and therefore may be exploited commercially or ruined environmentally.

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